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## Reko as an eco-innovation

Trogen, Ada

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## REKO as an eco-innovation

In this text I try to answer the profound question of REKO as an eco-innovation. I am tempted to use Shakespeare's best-known quote from Hamlet in a frame of REKO and eco-innovation but instead of Shakespeare I begin with proper term definitions of an eco-innovation and REKO.

Eco-innovation can be defined as a product, a service or a process that is new or substantially improved. It solves a challenge related to emission, waste, material use or energy consumption.

REKO is a short local food supply chain created in Finland by Thomas Snellman. The acronym comes from Swedish words *rejäl* (=fair) *konsumtion* (=consumption). There are almost 200 REKO-rings in Finland that operate via Facebook groups, including nearly 4000 local food producers. Approximately 400 000 people are members in those groups, but only a few percent of them are active customers.

Local food producers sell their products on closed Facebook-groups where delivery is also settled usually once or twice a month. Producer publishes a Facebook post and customers write their orders on the comment section. Delivery event usually takes around 30 to 45 minutes and is arranged at the place easily accessed by car. Local food products are handed to customers that circle around producers' open trunks.

Now we are getting into Shakespearian part: to be or not to be an eco-innovation? If you consider REKO, it is a new way of distributing local food products and the use of Facebook as a platform makes it also improved service compared to a typical farmer's market. Finland has a sparse population and only few cities has potential for a stationary markets. And we have at least six months of winterish weather so it is very convenient to order your local foods on the internet and just pop up to the delivery spot, grab your groceries and direct back to the comfort of your own home.

Eco-innovation should also solve an ecologic challenge. Because REKO-rings are local and food comes from near there is no unnecessary transportation. Due to the locality, products are always seasonal and because of preordering, food-waste on selling is limited. Products are preferably organic, but there are no strict demands for it. REKO has only a few basic principles and every REKO-ring can apply them as they prefer. Only resale is strictly prohibited.

In Finland, the main reasons to participate in REKO as a producer are straight contacts with customers without middlemen, possibility to make own, local products known and better sales. For REKO-customers two most important reasons to use REKO is their willingness to support local producers and fresh, tasty and good-quality products. It is clear that economic and product-related motives play a more important role than the ecological ones.

I have come to a conclusion that in case of REKO and the eco-innovation, the real question is not *to be or not to be*, but rather do participants want it to be? The way I see it REKO can also change the perspective how we think about food. It does not fit to the definition of eco-innovation, but it is at least as important aspect when considering sustainability.

If you consider sustainable food the main thing that matters is what we eat and how we prevent waste. In REKO-rings there are all kinds of products: vegetables, berries, fish, meats, eggs, honeys – you name it! Everything is fresh, local and tastes good. When I am buying a piece of quality meat (I prefer cheaper parts, they have the best flavor) I am thinking that it is food for the feast, not to consume every day. When I have met the person who planted, nurtured and harvested those potatoes it is harder to throw them into the bin. And little by little food is getting the respect that it should always have had. It should be cooked with care and eaten with devotion, preferably with the ones you love.